

## **CONTRIBUTION TO THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM ON WOMEN'S LIBERATION**

by Linda Blackwood

*(From LSA/LSO DB33, March 1973)*

This contribution is not intended as a counter document, that is, a document to replace the one adopted by the Political Committee last October and later amended, called Women's Liberation Resolution. Nor is it a full blown analysis of our work. Its purpose is to express some serious criticisms and differences with the 1973 Women's Liberation Resolution as amended, that are of such a character that they can only in part be presented as amendments.

The pre-convention discussion on our Women's Liberation work has been far from clear. The amendments to the document submitted by the Political Committee have not served to clarify the discussion. In fact, with the submission of the amendments the discussion has tended to become more confusing, and has served to undermine our work in this area.

Throughout the period of the fall, different comrades have put forward different interpretations of the amendments and the line of the amendments changed, in at least one case, between the time of the fall plenum and when the first reports reached the branches. We are referring here to the slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child". At the fall plenum the Central Committee decided that the slogan "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose" was to be raised as the main slogan to complement the demand for "Repeal of the Abortion Laws". The "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child" slogan was seen as a **useful** slogan of the campaign but because of certain weaknesses should not be the main slogan. When the report reached the branches the Political Committee line was to drop the slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child" completely.

The amendments have not served to correctly answer some of the questions posed by the repeal campaign. The amendments throw into doubt the line previously adopted by our movement: that being that the abortion campaign is central to the struggles of women at this time. The amendments have served to undermine not only our line on this campaign, but also our work. Our work in the abortion campaign this past fall has been almost paralyzed in some areas because of the confusion and uncertainty that exists around our political line, particularly concerning the repeal campaign. The example of this is our work in the YS Local in Toronto where the abortion campaign was virtually non-existent during the fall period.

Alongside the confusion of course there exists some political differences -- we have been hesitant to submit this document to the discussion because of the (lack of) clarity in political positions, particularly those of the leadership. Our hope is that the plenum discussion this weekend will clarify the discussion on both sides.

We would like to begin by pointing out the differences we have in summary form with the "1973 Women's Liberation Resolution" as amended.

1. We support the general line of the resolution as it was originally presented to the movement -- before it was amended. But even so we think that the document in itself is insufficient. It doesn't really reflect or flow out of the Canadian experience. Even though we support its general political line our criticisms are of a grave character.

2. **We are opposed to the amendments as proposed -- the amendments contradict and detract from the main line of the document. Specifically the amendments serve to undercut the established line of our movement that the abortion campaign is central to our Women's Liberation work** (*emphasis by the website ed.*)

The amendments, and the contributions by some of their leading exponents, have raised some very basic questions on the nature of the abortion campaign. Can we win? Can we build a mass movement at this time? The amendments pose objective problems facing the campaign at this time. We disagree with what the document says are objective problems and maintain that the objective situation makes possible the building of a mass movement at this time, a movement that can win.

3. We are opposed to dropping the slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child".

Briefly those points summarize the differences we have with the document as amended. The first part of this contribution concerns itself with the development of the abortion campaign in Canada and our movement's orientation and political analysis of this development (as traced through our documents and plenum reports), Comrade Henderson's report to this plenum traced some of the same things. We welcome that part of Henderson's report. One of the big weaknesses of the proposed resolution is that it does not rely on our previous analysis as documented in the resolutions of conventions and plenums of the LSA/ LSO but rather leans heavily on documents of the SWP.

### **The Abortion Campaign**

In discussing or reviewing the development of feminist ideas in Canada, one must first note with inspiration the extremely favourable situation in Canada which has accounted for a more sophisticated level of politics in this country. The existence of the NDP and its support, however minimal, to the main demands of women has served to give the ideas of the feminist movement a much broader and serious hearing among the masses. For example, the current of the feminist movement which adheres to "man-hating" or "man is the enemy" analysis never received a broad hearing in Canada as it did in the States, because in Canada the demands of women were raised within the NDP giving the feminist movement a vehicle (so to speak) within the system through which to work. Because the NDP was forced to take note of this latest segment of the radicalization moving forward, their gestures, however token, spurred a mass hearing for the ideas of feminism.

As a result of such factors as the existence of the NDP the movement in Canada has played a vanguard role -- internationally. In particular this is true around the abortion campaign — long before women anywhere had begun to move on this issue the small Women's Liberation Movement in Canada undertook its first public cross-country action, the Abortion Caravan in the Spring of 1970.

This action served not only to inspire and unite Canadian women but served as an example to women around the world. Canada has continued to play a leading role ever

since. Our paper the *Spokeswoman* is by far the most sophisticated paper of the Women's Liberation movement.

When the Abortion Caravan reached Ottawa with its call for "Free Abortion on Demand" and "Repeal of the Abortion Laws" the NDP caucus endorsed the action. Since that time the NDP, primarily through Grace MacInnis NDP MP, has continued to raise the issue of abortion to confront the Trudeau government at every opportunity.

Our movement followed very closely the developments of this growing movement. We intervened in the first campus-based new left groups. We prepared a brief for the Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women -- a model brief outlining the main demands of the emerging movement. Included were the key demands for legal abortion, 24-hour day care, etc.

In the 1970 document of the LSA/LSO we welcomed the Women's Liberation Movement as "a powerful indicator of the deepening radicalization taking place in Canada." We went on to say: "Our program is not only correct, it is indispensable for the future progress of this movement" -- and "the goal of this movement is not just women's liberation but the liberation of all humanity from the deep, sexual, psychological and economic oppression."

The 1970 document put forward our Marxist analysis of the oppression of women and detailed our revolutionary strategy. "We sought," the document says, "to show women that their oppression is rooted in capitalism and to win them to an understanding of what is necessary to destroy this system and win their liberation -- we want to fuse the struggle with other anti-capitalist struggles and carry them forward to a socialist solution."

At the 1970 convention four months after the Abortion Caravan, we singled out the demand "Free Abortion on Demand" as one of the central mobilizing demands of this movement. We said the task at that time was to "participate in the building of a movement that will attract new layers of women, educate them, and draw them into struggles around democratic and transitional demands."

**Shortly after the Caravan, many of the leaders of the action began to have serious doubts about the abortion campaign and what it posed. Their sectarianism and ultraleft politics led them very quickly to reject organizing women around this issue. These women clearly did not understand the revolutionary dynamic of this struggle waged in the interests of women against the state. They wanted to opt for what they claimed were more "revolutionary" struggles (*emphasis by the web Ed.*)**

The Saskatoon Women's Liberation Conference in the fall of 1970 saw the new left women completely reject the abortion issue and campaign. Putting forward many different strategies and issues for women, they condemned the abortion struggle as reformist, liberal, etc.

We intervened at this important conference and attempted to win women to support for continuing the abortion campaign, to move out and mobilize thousands of women. At a workshop of women agreeing with that perspective we laid the plans to continue the campaign for "Free Abortion on Demand" and have the next action the following spring. We were outnumbered at the conference and only a few besides our own forces attended the workshop.

The February 14 abortion actions In the spring of 1971 were very successful in drawing new women into the campaign and keeping the abortion campaign in the news. Since the Saskatoon Conference, the *Royal Commission Report on the Status of Women* had been published. It recommended repeal of the abortion laws and the Canadian Medical Association also took a stand in favour of repeal, as did the NDP. The Toronto Women's Caucus played the key role in building the February actions across the country.

Ever since, the Saskatoon Conference the abortion issue posed itself sharply within the women's movement. Some like Marlene Dixon took right wing positions -- that abortion was murder. Abortion was the issue that women were organizing around, attempting to build a mass movement of women. All the other strategies posed at that time were deadend and the groups that posed them were fast becoming deadend also.

It became obvious through our work with the abortion issue that an ongoing campaign would have to be waged to win the right to abortion for women. In our experiences with trying to involve other groups and women we found that the main slogan of the campaign, "Free Abortion on Demand", narrowed the support we could get for the campaign.

The change of the slogan to (")repeal of the laws(") that make abortion a criminal act brought broad forces into the campaign in a serious way. The Ontario Women for Abortion Law Repeal Coalition conference in the fall of 1971 marked a big step forward in initiating actions supported by women from all sectors of society. Significantly absent from the conference, were the other left tendencies. We were the only revolutionary socialist tendency. We played a leading role in winning the conference to our perspective of a mass repeal campaign.

The 1971 Plenum Report summarized the main points of the 1970 document and noted that we were correct in our analysis. We noted that the movement had continued to flourish and develop -- particularly, several women's liberation groups under our leadership had drawn many new women to the women's liberation movement and some of the groups like Toronto Women's Caucus and the Kitchener Waterloo group were key to launching the abortion repeal coalitions.

We noted that in particular we had to build coalitions on the campuses and in the high schools and involve the NDP in a big way. We said in this report that building the abortion campaign "is the key task at this time."

We recognized in the 1971 plenum report that the mass sentiment that existed for women's liberation had not yet been crystallized "into a powerful anti-capitalist movement" and that this was our key task. We had to put forward a strategy that would build such a movement. In building the repeal campaign we saw that opportunity.

In the fall of 1971 coalitions sprang up across the country. The November 20 actions were the biggest since the Caravan. Joe Borowski, the right wing NDP MPP, was ousted from the Manitoba cabinet through the efforts of the Manitoba Abortion Action Coalition.

In the spring of the next year our movement submitted a paper, "A (Revolutionary) Socialist Strategy for Women's Liberation" (*see W10-1972-DB14 Women's Liberation Resolution* --ed.) in which we debated, primarily with Waffle and NDP women, the socialist strategy for women's liberation.

"As socialist women we must do more than just work out an abstract strategy for women on paper. We have to take part in the real political life of this country. And the fact is, there already exists in Canada the core of a mass, united movement of women – the movement to repeal the anti-abortion laws. **It is no accident or arbitrary choice that has made the abortion issue emerge on an international scale as the foremost issue around which women are organizing!**" (my emphasis)

"In Canada, this issue has already shown its ability to rally thousands of women in a movement which is having a profound impact on political life in this country. Other issues, particularly equal pay for equal work, an end to job discrimination, and child care facilities, have also emerged since the rebirth of the feminist movement. These issues are very important, and essential for the liberation of women. But it has been the abortion issue that has been able to inspire and unite so many thousands of women in struggle against their oppressors."

In the spring of 1972, coalitions in nine provinces met in Winnipeg and formed the Canadian Women's Coalition to fight for repeal. The gathering of over 200 women was the largest feminist gathering in Canada to that date. The Coalition projected an ongoing campaign of petitioning, demonstrations, educationals, meetings to build the coalitions and to draw women into the struggle.

During 1972, over 100,000 signatures were gathered for the repeal petition; over 17 campus referenda affirmed the overwhelming support of students for repeal; May 1 to 6 saw a week of educationals and demonstrations and petitioning across the country. An Ottawa woman was denied a legal abortion and the Ontario Coalition launched demonstrations and actions on her behalf. In October 1972, women confronted the candidates. The NDP responded in a modest way across the country and Lewis came out for repeal during the elections. Eleanor Pelrine, leading activist and author, of *Abortion in Canada*, ran as a candidate for the NDP.

In short the abortion issue had become a major political issue in Canada; the polls showed that a majority -- almost two thirds of all Canadians -- support repeal, compared to the 43% who agreed in 1969. The repeal movement had convinced the majority of Canadians. The abortion campaign became the only ongoing campaign carried by women. The only campaign that sought to organize and unite women against the state.

## **The Amendments**

The abortion campaign has drawn thousands of women into some level of activity -- the abortion issue has remained the biggest point of conflict with the State which has made concessions and paid lip service to nearly every other demand raised by women. On the question of abortion it has remained firm in complete opposition.

In comrade Henderson's report to the plenum in the fall of 1972, she raised seven points which were later to become the amendments which we think are in grave error. We are not going to deal with them all, only the most important.

The first point of the amendments that we wish to take up is the statement that "the coalition to repeal the abortion laws is not a mass movement." Although not written into the amendments, in verbal discussions with comrades, and in comments at the YS/LJS Convention, it is clear that some leading comrades are putting into question whether we can build a mass movement around the demand for repeal **at this time**. All the comrades agree that we have a mass action perspective of eventually building a mass movement, but they claim that the possibilities are limited in this period.

First of all, we would agree that the repeal movement is not yet a mass movement in a physical sense. In this it is not unlike the Canadian anti-war movement which is no doubt a mass movement but often doesn't take on a physical form. We have a mass hearing. But the gap between the consciousness that exists in favor of repeal and the mobilizability of the masses remains considerable.

The amended section of the document attempts to answer why there is not a mass movement at this time.

"On page 15 under the section entitled the "Abortion Campaign" the document says: "The difficulties in building the abortion campaign are rooted in the objective problems facing the feminist movement."

What follows that statement is an explanation of why we have not been able to build a mass movement around the issue of abortion. "The reasons given by the comrades as objective problems are these:

- 1) "not since the suffrage movement have women attempted to launch an independent, coordinated, Canada-wide struggle for their rights."
- 2) "It is a big step for women to move from questioning her role in society or even from a partial understanding of her oppression, to join an organized campaign against aspects of her oppression."
- 3) "several alternatives are posed to women, e.g. personal liberation, counter institutions, lobbying for women's rights etc. "How should woman end her oppression? This is a big and difficult question for radicalizing women."

The first point we would like to make is that the problems posed in the amendments are not objective factors -- objective meaning that which is real, independent of personal feelings, etc. Rather what the document has posed are subjective factors.

We would challenge comrades to put forward some objective factors or problems that stand in the way of building a mass movement at this time! It seems to us there are no major ones; that in fact, the possibilities for building such a movement around the demand for repeal are ripe.

There are obstacles though and we suggest that the biggest obstacle is the crisis of leadership. This problem exists on two levels, the most important being the default of all other left tendencies from this campaign; not only default but opposition to building the repeal campaign. The NDP, Waffle, with their mass hearing, the CP which is not inconsequential -- none of them, not to mention the Red Circle, CPL (*and other*) Maoists, etc., have taken up any of the responsibility of leadership for this campaign.

The other aspect of the leadership question is the role our movement has been able to play as a small nucleus of the vanguard party with its limited resources, etc. **Without our leadership there would not exist a mass oriented repeal campaign. Without our intervention the liberals might carry some action but it would not be mass oriented. That, we could be sure of. So, our role is crucial.**

**Just to go back to the amendment for a minute and discuss the "objective problems" cited. It seems that what the comrades are posing is that the problem lies with the masses of women themselves. This is not a Marxist concept. We do**

**not put the onus on the masses of women. The elemental consciousness, the potential is there. The task is for the leadership to lead the masses into struggle. The problems posed by the amendments are clearly false** (*emphasis by the website ed.*)

Trotsky wrote in *Strategy and Tactics of the Imperialist Epoch*, "as soon as the objective prerequisites have matured, the key to the whole historical process passes into the hands of the subjective factor, that is the party."

We could also quote our co-thinkers in the IMG (*British section of the F.I.*) in their document "Tasks and Perspectives." "Despite the tremendous potential that exists today for building an independent, mass action oriented women's movement, little progress has been made in the past year. This is due primarily to the absence of a revolutionary socialist leadership that understands both the oppression of women as women and the inter-relationship of the struggle for women's liberation with the fight for socialism." We have noted the default of the other tendencies. We do not accept their absence but continually challenge them to respond to this campaign.

We would now like to discuss the leadership problem as it faces our movement. The emerging women's liberation movement in Canada has provided our movement with an enormous challenge. From the very beginning our movement responded and strained its meager resources and cadre to meet the needs of this movement. The number of leaders that we have developed in our movement and in the women's liberation movement testifies to the seriousness with which we view developing our women cadre and giving leadership to the women's liberation movement.

Particularly impressive is our work in building the mass repeal campaign. Our forces have accomplished this. We have carried a campaign around a key demand for women which has successfully mobilized more women than any other issue in the women's movement. We have built this ongoing single issue campaign which has successfully made abortion a serious political issue in Canada. We set up coalitions in nine provinces and organized the Winnipeg Conference, which, until the Status of Women Conference took place, was the largest feminist gathering since the movement re-emerged. Our leadership moved out boldly to take on the Right to Life and carried a petition campaign which reached thousands.

We were not only the builders and leaders of this movement. We were the revolutionaries. We carried our strategy, our analysis, to the women in the coalitions.

This is not to say we were without problems; in fact serious problems existed which are important for our movement to evaluate.

Developing a leadership in the area of our women's work has been a difficult task. For a long time in Toronto the coalition has been periodically paralyzed by one crisis or another. Recent discussions in this pre-convention period have increasingly brought out the (lack of) clarity in our work. The leadership of our movement has also been periodically paralyzed and unable to lead.

For instance last fall (fall of 1971) we remember vividly the problems facing us -- the operation in the coalition was inward turned, exclusive, not bringing new comrades into the work and the leadership.

Our movement's leadership was for a period unable to function with the comrades in the coalition. There was an artificial division between the comrades on staff in our movement and the comrades in the coalition. These were political problems. Our

inexperienced leadership was unable to lead effectively and as a result the operation would persistently break down. Many of these problems have been overcome. It is important to evaluate these experiences however.

One ongoing problem our movement has faced is the lack of an effective ongoing leadership for our cross country work. We were not able to give political leadership effectively because there was no ongoing collective operation of leading comrades. In the past year we have had three different cross-country Women's Coordinators. This is not because of a continuing development in leadership, but rather because of the inadequacy of leadership in the area.

Comrades working in the coalition were often frustrated because the movement's leadership was not behind the work of the coalition when our line on the abortion campaign was consistently under attack. Inside our own movement leading activists in the coalition were very often isolated.

There are other problems. We have not been able to carry the petition campaign. For example, we have not been able to mobilize our own movement to take the petition into the main areas of the League's work -- into circles like the Left Caucus, etc.

Within our movement our line on the abortion campaign has come under harsh attacks and many doubts by our movement. This is true of our women's work more than any other area. We as a leadership have in large part been unable to bring our movement in behind our work in the abortion campaign.

Externally we have not moved out to confront opponents and other leftists with our politics. This is a political weakness. In circles like the Left Caucus where there are supporters of the League's politics, we have been unable to convince many of our line in carrying the abortion campaign.

The women comrades in our movement have felt acutely the weakness of our leadership in this area of work. In Vancouver before we were able to make an effective intervention in Women's Studies the movement had to take on a series of classes to prepare the comrades politically. We have to recognize the political weaknesses in this area and begin the process of overcoming it.

The weakness of our leadership is reflected in other ways -- one is in the lack of confidence our women comrades feel as leaders. We must keep in mind that we are continually in the process of building a leadership; that process never stops. We have a leadership in our women's work. This contribution is intended to point out some of the weaknesses and problems that we must overcome.

It is important that we evaluate our leadership experiences and learn lessons and draw conclusions from them.

We would like to summarize what we have said about leadership and objective problems.

The possibilities are there to build a mass movement now. This is not speculative or rash. This does not mean that we can build a mass movement overnight. We are in the process of building that mass movement. Of central importance is that we maintain that concept, and the concept that we are out to win. Those concepts allow us to continue to move out boldly, to accept the challenges posed and to seek to unite new layers of women

all the time.

The amendment points out that the forces within the NDP and among the student left are a priority. Yes they are. But we are moving beyond these layers and it is the students and the NDP who we should mobilize as activists to carry us out and beyond themselves to broaden even more the campaign. We are speaking to the broad masses of people with the campaign **now**. Vehicles like the petition campaign make it possible to mobilize entire new sectors in the unions, communities, etc.

**We would put forward that if anything is lacking to build such a movement it is a leadership capable of the task. That is not to say that our movement is not capable of meeting its key role in this task -- it is. We are concerned that our movement might be retreating. This is the implication of the amendments. They suggest our role might become a supplementary one, rather than a leading one** (*emphasis by the website editor*).

Our movement has to take up the challenge of building the repeal campaign more now than ever before, not by substituting itself but by learning how to challenge other forces and mobilize a leadership capable of effectively responding to the challenge.

Another point on the amendments. Comrades in putting forth an explanation of the amendments have pointed out that the amendments try to come to grips with some problems in our orientation to our women's work — namely the problem of our lack of intervention in other aspects of the women's movement. This is certainly a valid criticism. For a whole period we tended to have a very formal approach to our work in the abortion campaign. It was the be all and the end all. I do not think that was a problem with the line of the movement though. Never anywhere in our press, in documents or in reports did we exclude intervention in other aspects of the women's movement. On the contrary, we applied the line incorrectly. We as a leadership did not give correct direction to our work. We did not move out and take opportunities.

The amendments, it seems to us, in trying to correct this problem, have done so at the expense of the abortion campaign.

Speaking specifically to the amendments though -- the amendments pose the abortion issue and the abortion struggle in a very confusing way. Before discussing the importance of the abortion issue the amendments first talk about the "struggle perspective" posed by the campaign. The amendments put emphasis on the struggle and the importance of winning women to a struggle perspective.

It seems to me that this is a backward way of approaching things.

The amendments put forward that we have to win women to a struggle perspective. It seems to us that this concept addresses itself to other radicals who we think have to be convinced of a mass action strategy. We gather they don't oppose the demand for repeal of the abortion laws, they oppose our strategy of mass action. We are not opposed to taking time out to convince other radicals of our concept of revolutionary action but this is not the main task. The main task is to win the masses into action. **The masses of women will be won to the campaign through the issue of abortion** (*emphasis by the author*). **They feel the need to do something about their oppression. We will never win the masses of women to our campaign if we try to win them by convincing them of a "struggle perspective."** The role of a leadership is to organise the masses in campaigns and ongoing struggles to meet their needs (*emphasis by the*

*website editor*).

The amendments no longer refer to the abortion campaign as the centre of our work. Words like "coming to the fore" and "forefront" are used. (We welcome the expression used in the **draft** of the Political Resolution that has been circulated for discussion at this plenum -- that the abortion campaign should be the focus of our Women's Liberation work. By this we presume that the political resolution is re-affirming the position that our movement expressed before the amendments to the Women's Liberation Resolution were put forward -- the position that our movement treat the abortion campaign as its number one priority in our Women's Liberation work). These terms are confusing. They clearly suggest a change in line. Comrades who support the amendments have to define what they mean. In light of these amendments we no longer feel confident that the abortion campaign is at the centre of our Women's Liberation work. I get the impression that other matters are pushing abortion work out of the way.

In Comrade Henderson's summary I would like her to say in the clearest terms where the abortion campaign stands in relation to our other work.

In summary then -- on that section. We are called upon to meet the challenge of a developing mass repeal movement. Revolutionaries are called upon to take the initiative and to move out boldly as our 1970 document says to win "new layers of women" to the struggle.

The single issue repeal campaign is of central importance to our women's liberation work. In the early 1900's winning the vote was a crucial campaign for women, crucial to the progress of the struggle. Today, the abortion issue represents the next crucial step women must take in freeing themselves. It is hard to imagine other ongoing struggles or the abortion issue fading behind other campaigns before women win repeal. Women must win the right for abortion in order to move forward.

Putting the abortion issue at the center of our work does not dismiss other aspects of our work. Rather it put other aspects in their place in relation to the central aspect of our work.

### **Every Mother a Willing Mother/Every Child a Wanted Child**

The slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child" has been used to broaden the appeal of the coalition work. We have used this slogan very effectively around the petition campaign to reach the broadest layers of people. We have used this slogan to counter the arguments of the "Right to Life." The "Right to Life" argues that we are murderers for advocating repeal; we respond that **WE** are the people really concerned about life -- the lives of women and of course children -- not they.

**This slogan effectively speaks to the needs of the masses of women in a popular way with which most women can identify. In dropping this slogan we will be limiting the scope of the campaign. To denounce its use is sectarian -- besides being futile as it is firmly planted in the movement** (*emphasis by the website editor*).

This slogan reflects the best traditions of the woman's movement. The Women's Liberation Movement has always been concerned about the problems of humanity and children. This slogan became prominent with the Abortion Caravan of 1970. The

leaflet for the Caravan raised the concept of the unwilling mother and used the slogan "Every Child a Wanted Child." Quoting from that leaflet: "These laws are supposed to reflect the 'sacredness' of human life in this society. We know that this is utter hypocrisy when the foetus is valued so highly that it cannot be destroyed, but there is so little regard for the welfare of human beings. WE CAN CREATE LAWS FORCING A WOMAN TO BEAR AN UNWANTED CHILD, BUT WE CANNOT MAKE LAWS FORCING HER TO LOVE THAT CHILD. It is inhuman for men and women to be forced to raise a child they do not want; it is inhuman to subject a child to the resentment and despair of parents who never meant to bear it. Is it any wonder that there are so many cases of child-battering, and even cases of children dying from these beatings?"

We moved out boldly in the spring of this year to use the slogan when possibilities were opening up for us. It became the theme of the Winnipeg Conference. We used it to successfully take on the "Right to Life" for the first time.

Comrades have said that it is a diversion to talk about children in the Women's Liberation Movement. There is nothing wrong with raising the needs of children in this campaign. Comrades express the fear that the campaign will not be explicitly feminist unless we zero in on the needs of women exclusively. By discussing the needs of children and men, "human rights", we broaden the appeal of the campaign to those very forces; and in fact draw in more women also.

To quote George Novak (*the veteran SWP-US author*): "... the abortion campaign is built around the demand for women's as well as human rights since men and children are also affected by restrictions on abortion."

We are not concerned that the "Right to Life" attempts to manipulate the slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, every Child a Wanted Child." The "Right to Life" will attempt to use any one of our slogans. "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose" is used by the "Right to Life". On October 21 they pictured a so-called female fetus with the caption "What about her Right to Choose?"

We would like to take up some of the arguments that have been advanced against the slogan -- one being that the slogan is not clear.

None of our slogans are completely clear by themselves. Even our main demand, "Repeal all Abortion Laws," now contains confusion. We should try to make them as clear as possible. We feel the slogan is understandable. It is designed to complement the demand for repeal. I think that it does that and in a very popular way which most women can identify with. We are not speaking against the slogan "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose," which we think should remain the central slogan of the campaign.

There are few slogans that can stand by themselves and are impossible to misinterpret. The slogan "Out Now" is certainly not a clear slogan that would stand alone. This slogan could easily refer to U.S. out of Canada as well as U.S. out of S.E. Asia, as we can be sure CLMers (*a Maoist tendency -- ed.*) interpret it.

It is claimed that the slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child" is not feminist. First on the nature of the campaign, objectively this is a feminist campaign, a campaign waged in the interest of winning repeal -- the right to choose for women. The slogan "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child" expresses in broad terms the concept of a woman's right to choose if and when

they will become mothers. Because the slogan expresses this right, how can it be anything but feminist?

Comrades are disturbed that the slogan "poses the question within the traditional role allotted women -- that of mothers" (quote from amendment). We gather from this that comrades think we are accepting, even condoning, that women's role is that of mother and child-bearer. But in actuality this slogan recognizes the present reality and consciousness of the masses of women and addresses our propaganda to it. **This slogan does not promote motherhood (as our support for the NDP hardly amounts to promoting the NDP) but rather speaks to the question of motherhood through the demand that women decide for themselves when and if they will become mothers** (*emphasis by the website editor*).

This slogan is not anti-women because it refers to motherhood.. Women's liberation does not reject women becoming mothers -- it rejects **forced** motherhood. It is safe to say that the majority of men and women view having children as a normal and enjoyable experience on the whole, despite capitalism and the problems it imposes on them. Since the slogan clearly calls for women to be willing mothers, comrades' arguments logically take them in the direction of opposing women becoming mothers. This has been the direction of the discussion on some levels of our movement.

Such a position is untenable. We are opposed to the nuclear family and, against forced motherhood, but not against motherhood or child-bearing and rearing. It is false for individual comrades to attempt to impose their life-style not only on our movement but on the mass movement. As the nucleus of the vanguard party we are not opposed to women comrades having children nor are we opposed to children. If such an atmosphere were to develop around our movement it would block our recruitment of some of the best elements of the working class, in fact we could never become the vanguard.

The amendment says that the slogan "Abortion: A Woman's Right to Choose" directs its appeal at all layers of women. So does the slogan "'Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child.'" That's our experience. We were able to use this slogan effectively in high schools, during the campus referenda, etc. The reason for the broad appeal of this slogan is that all women can identify with it because when a woman becomes pregnant, what is posed (no matter what age) is whether or not she will have the child and become a mother. Motherhood is posed to any woman who becomes pregnant whether she is young or old, married or single. The choice is whether or not to become a mother. Therefore the concept of willing mother is popular and easily understood by all women.

It is said in the amendments that the slogan "'Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child' does not pose the right of women to abortion." I would be interested to know just what the comrades think the slogan says. The slogan has its weaknesses but that is not one of them. This slogan was obviously designed to complement the main demand for repeal of the abortion laws.

### **The Abortion Campaign: How to Build it in the Next Period**

Before we go into the final section of the document we would like to outline how we think the abortion campaign should be carried in the next period.

1) We think the possibilities exist for organizing masses of women in this campaign from all sectors of society, with priority on the NDP and students.

2) In order to do this we should effectively move out to meet the challenges of building such a movement by:

- a. stepping up the petition campaign
- b. continuing to use the slogan, along with the right to choose, "Every Mother a Willing Mother, Every Child a Wanted Child"
- c. considering the possibility of carrying a bi-national referendum on abortion. The polls show that we have the majority. Borowski has now decided to launch a broad-scale attack on us. We have to respond. It could be done alongside a powerful petition campaign which would be a big organizational and educational tool. (*PM Pierre*) Trudeau has already given us an opening. We should take the offensive to meet the challenge.
- d. making *Spokeswoman* a regular publication not just a mobilizer. It should play a key educational role in the women's movement.

These proposals are in addition to the ones posed by Comrade Henderson in her report to today's plenum.

This is not an all-or-nothing, breakthrough plan. It is based on objective possibilities revealed in this period. The challenge to us is to respond. We are concerned that our movement **continue** to move out boldly to meet this challenge.

### **Other Aspects of Our Women's Liberation Work**

In the final section of this report we would like to take up other aspects of our work in women's liberation.

Because the abortion campaign must be at the center of our work, other interventions we make in other areas of the movement should be designed primarily to build the abortion campaign in those areas.

We recognize that at this time no other issue has the potential to build a mass movement as does abortion. Although it is conceivable that the abortion movement might be bypassed for another ongoing struggle of women, this is highly unlikely and speculative at best. As revolutionaries we are concerned with the objective situation as it exists at present.

Because this campaign is central to our work this does not mean we put blinders on and refuse to intervene in other developments. We weigh our limited resources and the importance of any given action and intervene accordingly. Always first in our minds is winning women to the central campaign around abortion, not because we are single-issue fetishers, but because we understand that this campaign is key for women. This campaign poses for feminists and socialists the fight against the state.

The developing women's liberation movement in Canada has broadened considerably in the last year. Feminist papers and literature have flourished. A Women's Center has been set up in Toronto and of course, a very significant development — women's studies -- on most of the campuses.

Women's studies were set up by the university administrations as a concession to the Women's Liberation Movement. No struggles were fought to get them. They are an attempt, like the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, to siphon off discontent among women.

The courses provide a vehicle for us to intervene in large gatherings of women open to new ideas, especially revolutionary ideas. We welcome these courses on that basis.

At the same time we note their limitations. They do not pose women moving into action. They are not a movement of women. We should caution comrades. They should not become the "pivot" of our women's liberation work, as one written contribution to the Youth convention suggests.

Although these studies vary in their flexibility and opportunities, etc., it is dangerous to give great weight to them. Our experiences with them are uneven. We got a positive response in the UBC studies group to the abortion campaign. At U. of T. we got nowhere posing the abortion campaign. The U. of T. group did not respond at all to a crucial defense campaign.

It is wrong to concentrate our forces in the women's studies area. Women are not won to a mass action campaign primarily through such things as women's studies. Women come to a mass action perspective because of issues, primarily abortion at this time. In these courses we are there to pose, along with our Marxist theory -- class action -- the abortion campaign.

This contribution is not designed to turn comrades off the women's studies courses. They are important from the point of view of women learning theory and our comrades posing our Marxist analysis. We should have a balanced view of what they are and what the abortion campaign gets out of them and where they take the women's liberation movement.

## **Summary of the Plenum Presentation and Discussion**

It was gratifying for us to see that the draft Political Resolution described the abortion campaign as the "focus of our women's liberation work." This can serve to clear up the confusion that the amendments have brought into our ranks — we will see. In summary I would like to take up the questions posed in the discussion.

Comrade LM asked what we thought the objective problems were. As I said in the report I thought there were no major objective problems standing in the way of our building a mass movement at this time. There are subjective factors however, that affect our ability to do this. The most important is the failure of the NDP to do more than make the record, which GA touched on in his contribution today.

I never posed in my presentation that our leadership had defaulted in its responsibility in building this campaign. What I posed was a crisis of leadership in the whole left and some difficulties in our own movement which has tried to respond to the challenge and which through common effort we can rectify.

In closing I would like to say that I thought comrade Henderson's report did not deal with some of the big experiences of our work. The report does not draw a balance sheet of our experiences with Toronto Women's Caucus, or the NDP, for example.

I therefore move to drop the amendments to the Women's Liberation Resolution.

*ROSS DOWSON WEBSITE EDITOR COMMENT:*

*Readers are referred to a subsequent April 1973 document (DB 49) by Linda Blackwood, "Women's Liberation, a counter-resolution," as well as an earlier December 1972 document by three LSA activists (DB 23, text in W10) "The Toronto Women's Caucus: A Two-Year Experience in a Cross-City Women's Liberation Group)*